



Making the case for healthy nutrition

for people needing special care



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Nutrition deserves special attention as people reach older age and is essential for good health. Despite the growing awareness of the importance of nutrition for a good and healthy life, malnutrition is still a widespread problem among older people, who are hospitalized, live in a nursing home or need home care services. In this document, we describe best practices in nutritional care and review some of the different solutions available in the market.

Making the case for healthy nutrition for people needing special care

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Nutrition deserves special attention as people reach older age and is essential for good health.

Despite the growing awareness of the importance of nutrition for a good and healthy life, malnutrition is still a widespread problem among older people, who are hospitalized, live in a nursing home or need home care services. It is estimated that about 50 % of this group have a low BMI due to low calorie and protein intake. Furthermore, lack of important vitamins and minerals is typically found in this population group.

Did you know that...

... older people need more protein than younger people?

The required amount of protein for healthy people under the age of 65 is 0.8-1.5 g/kg body weight. For healthy people over 65, the recommended intake of protein is 1.1-1.3 g/kg body weight in order to sustain muscle mass and strength. Bed-bound people require even more protein to help sustain muscle mass.

Source: Nordic Council (2012). *Nordic Nutrition Recommendations 2014* (5. udg.) Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers

Malnutrition is not only found among older people, but also among people with different kinds of illnesses, e.g. severe infections or rheumatoid arthritis. The problem is widespread, and it is estimated that up to 30 percent of patients at hospitals are suffering from malnutrition, while 20 percent are at risk of malnutrition when they are admitted to hospital.

How to calculate BMI (Body Mass Index)

BMI is an important measure that can be applied to determine state of nutrition.

When calculating BMI, you weight (in kilograms) over your height squared (in meters).

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (kg)}}{\text{height}^2 \text{ (m)}}$$



For younger people, a BMI of 18.5-25 is normal. Among older and/or hospitalized people, a BMI below 20.5 is underweight.

BMI should never be used as the only factor to determine state of nutrition.

Sudden loss of weight (more than 5 % in a month or 15 % in 3 months) always calls for closer examination and increased focus on nutrition.

Source: Hessel, I. & Jeppesen, P.B. (2011). *Ernæring og aldring*. I: Cederholm, T. (red.). *Klinisk ernæring* (5. udg.) København: Munksgaard Danmark

Malnutrition trails a number of serious consequences, among others ill-health, sarcopenia, reduced quality of life and increased need of help and support in daily life. An unrelenting focus on nutrition is therefore required in the care sector, and a diet with high protein and energy (especially fat) and frequent meals can help mitigate the problem. At the same time, physical exercise can help sustain and build muscle mass.



Best practice nutritional care

As a leading supplier of health care products, it is Abena's vision to provide practice-related and holistic nutrition solutions that are easy to use in daily life and seek to improve quality of life of the individual. We believe in an individualized approach to healthy nutrition and we support this approach by supporting health practitioners and other care givers in finding the right solution that fits individual needs.

Our team of experienced dietitians, nutritionists and nurses advises on choice and use of products. In close collaboration with practitioners and researchers in the field of nutrition, we have established a number of best practice practices related to nutritional care. The principles can help guide choice of products and support good health among older people and other people with a need for special care.

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Focus on good eating and drinking habits

If patients suffer from lack of appetite or need extra energy and protein, good eating habits are the first steps in ensuring sufficient nourishment. It is recommended to eat small meals during the day, preferably 6-8 meals per day, high in energy and protein. Snacking makes

up an important part of the diet when the appetite is weak, and snacking can easily make up 50 percent of the daily intake of nutrients.

Fluids are required for many, basic functions of the body. The recommended intake for fluids varies from one individual to the next. Solid foods contributes approx. 20 percent of total fluid intake. The remainder of the fluid needs to come from milk-based drinks, water, tea, coffee and other beverages.

Best practices for tube feeding

A number of different illnesses and conditions may necessitate tube feeding. To ensure sufficient nutrition, full-nutritional products are available, comprising the required amounts of energy, protein, vitamins, minerals and micro-nutrients like calcium, iodine and sodium.

The amount of food and drink must be calculated on an individual basis. In order to make a plan for the tube feeding it is advised to use the weight, height, age, activity level and possible illness of the patient. In the beginning, a standard product can be used, typically fed six times a day. It is important to ensure correct mobilization. For bed-bound patients this means that the headboard of the bed should be raised to an angle of 35-40 degrees during meals to prevent aspiration and ensure proper digestion.

It is also important that the food is not administered too quickly. As a rule of thumb, the tube meal should last about the same time as a normal meal.

In cases where the standard products do not provide sufficient nutrition, cause allergy or there is a need for other dietary compositions, a wide variety of special products is available. Often, there might be a need for a product with a higher level of protein or liquid – or the patient may contract diarrhea, which necessitates a

change of product. The range of special products comprises among others products with enhanced protein, fat, low sodium and products made from soya.

Tube feeding causes diarrhea in 10-25 percent of the patients. There are many different reasons for this complication, among others the use of antibiotics or laxatives. Insufficient hygiene is a frequent cause of diarrhea, and good hand hygiene is essential when handling feeding tubes and meals.

If the defecation patterns suddenly change or if frequent diarrhea or constipation occur, it is important to consider a change of product that is more suitable for the condition.

High-nutrition beverages and desserts to supplement normal diets

For people who can eat normally, but are still lacking sufficient nutrients, there is a need to supplement the diet with high-nutrition beverages or desserts. Some products provide full nourishment, covering all needs for energy, protein, vitamins, minerals and micro-nutrients. Other drinks and desserts offer a supplement to the ordinary diet. In general, the beverages and desserts have a high level of energy and protein.

Benefits of physical activity



Lying in bed all day or sitting in an armchair does not stimulate the appetite, on the contrary.

Physical activity improves muscle strength, power and endurance; it also stimulates the appetite and positively impacts the dietary intake of required nutrients.

Source: Sundhedsstyrelsen, (u.å.). Når du skal tage på. Lokaliseret d. 12-07-2017 på <https://www.sst.dk/-/media/78809D18874E442E962C4CC63E091BBE.ashx>

All drinks and desserts can be used to supplement an ordinary diet or serve as a meal in itself. The high-nutrition products are available with many different tastes and textures. In order to encourage the patient to consume the products, it is important to find the taste that appeals most to the individual, keeping in mind that taste may vary over time. At the same time, it is important to ensure that the nutrition values are sufficient and that these may also vary over time.

For patients with chewing and/or swallowing difficulties, thin food and liquids should be avoided. Instead, thickeners can be used to achieve the required texture.

Look out for symptoms that may indicate malnutrition

Reduced appetite is the most frequent cause of malnutrition. Always consult a doctor to determine the reason for the reduced appetite that may be caused by illness, fatigue or old age. When the appetite is weak, dietary supplements can ensure healthy and sufficient nutrition.

Swallowing difficulty is another cause of malnutrition. Use of thickeners can help achieve the right, easy-to-swallow consistency of the food and/or beverage.

More or less permanent nausea is another reason for loss of appetite. If tube feeding is required, the nausea may be reduced by use of enteral feeding pump, more frequent meals or change of products.





A lot to be gained by healthy nutrition

Healthy nutrition deserves attention in the care sector and provides a number of advantages for patients and their relatives as well as for care givers and institutions.

- For patients, healthy nutrition enhances quality of life, supporting physical activity, social interaction and reducing fatigue and risk of diseases.
- For care givers, healthy nutrition for the patients provides benefits in terms of happy patients and relatives and less strain in the daily work when people are more self-sufficient and able to care for themselves.
- For hospitals, care institutions and in the home care sector, a preventive focus on healthy nutrition brings down the costs for treatment of complications and reduces the strain on personnel, improving the work environment.

APPENDIX:

How to achieve optimum nutrition tailored to individual needs

The following principles and guidelines have been developed by Abena based on the company's deep know-how and experience. By following the principles and guidelines, caregivers can achieve optimum nutrition care tailored to individual needs.

Focus on good eating, drinking and exercising habits



- If patients suffer from lack of appetite or need extra energy and protein, good eating habits are the first steps in ensuring sufficient nourishment.
- It is recommended to eat small meals during the day, preferably 6-8 meals per day, high in energy and protein.
- The recommended intake for fluids varies from one individual to the next and with climatic conditions.
- Physical exercise improves muscle strength, power and endurance; it also stimulates the appetite and positively impacts the dietary intake of required nutrients.

Look out for symptoms that may indicate malnutrition



- Always consult a doctor to determine the exact reason for reduced appetite.
- If the appetite is weak, dietary supplements can ensure healthy and sufficient nutrition.
- In case of swallowing difficulty, thickeners can help achieve the right, easy-to-swallow consistency of the food and/or beverage.
- More or less permanent nausea is another reason for loss of appetite. If tube feeding is required, the nausea may be reduced by use of enteral feeding pump more frequent meals or change of products.

Supplement the normal diet with high-nutrition products if required



- For people who can eat normally, but are still lacking sufficient nutrients, there is a need to supplement the diet with high-nutrition beverages or desserts.
- Drinks and desserts can be used to supplement an ordinary diet or serve as a meal in itself.
- Experiment with different tastes to stimulate appetite. Keep in mind that taste and need for specific nutrients vary over time.
- For patients with chewing and/or swallowing difficulties, thin food and liquids should be avoided. Instead, thickeners can be used to achieve the required texture.

Tube feeding requires special attention



- The amount of food and drink must be calculated on an individual basis. In order to make a plan for the tube feeding it is advised to use the weight, height, age, activity level and possible illness of the patient.
- To ensure sufficient nutrition, a wide range of products are available, comprising different amounts of energy, protein, vitamins, minerals and micro-nutrients.
- Ensure correct mobilization for tube feeding. For bed-bound patients this means that the head-board of the bed should be raised to an angle of 35-40 degrees during meals.
- Take the time needed for tube feeding. As a rule of thumb, the tube meal should last about the same time as a normal meal.
- If the defecation patterns suddenly change or if frequent diarrhea or constipation occur, it is important to consider a change of product that is more suitable for the condition. Always consult a doctor for correct diagnosis of the problem.